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ABSTRACT

The rationale for and design of an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) course that integrates language instruction and cultural awareness of English-speaking communities are explained. It is argued that this approach offers the best opportunity for achieving a genuinely communicative approach to school-based language learning. In the first section, it is suggested that meaningful language use can be sustained in the classroom only if a coherent syllabus of knowledge is studied through the target language, and that the most appropriate subject for such study is one where the target language offers students learning opportunities not available through the first language, a requirement met by comparative cultural studies. In the second section, some of the issues involved in designing such a program are discussed. The third section outlines an integrated syllabus for the junior cycle of secondary school, and the fourth section focuses on implementation. In this section, sample units and lessons are described. A brief bibliography is included. Contains 22 references. (MSE)

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TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Centre for Language and Communication Studies

An integrated ESL and cultural studies syllabus

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CLCS Occasional Paper No.42
Summer 1995

An integrated ESL and cultural studies syllabus*

by

Dee McGarry

0 Introduction

In this paper I argue that an integrated language and cultural studies syllabus offers the best opportunities for achieving a genuinely communicative approach to school-based language learning. In the first section I suggest that meaningful language use can be consistently sustained in the classroom only if a coherent syllabus of knowledge is studied through the target language. I also suggest that the most appropriate subject for such study is one where the target language offers the students learning opportunities not available through their L1 – a requirement met by comparative cultural studies. In the second section I discuss some of the issues involved in designing a programme for cultural studies. In the third section I present an integrated syllabus for the junior cycle of secondary school and in the fourth section I discuss the implementation of the syllabus.

1 The communicative approach and the focus on meaning in the language classroom

Every year millions of teenagers are set the task of acquiring a

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* An earlier version of this paper was submitted in fulfilment of the dissertation requirement of the M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics, University of Dublin, Trinity College, Michaelmas term 1994.

new language. It may be the language of a country they have never visited, of a culture they know little or nothing about. Their only exposure to the language may be a few hours' work each week in a classroom and they may not, as students, be able to envisage a time when they would ever have the opportunity or the necessity to live – to work and socialize – through that language.

Every year hundreds of thousands of adults and children have to learn a new language in a new country. Unlike the classroom learner, the immigrant is surrounded by the new language and has an overriding need to communicate in that language in order to survive in the new community and to acquire an understanding of the ways of that community.

Very different though their immediate needs and circumstances might be, research suggests that the key to successful language acquisition is the same for both school student and immigrant. In fact the communicative approach to language teaching, which was originally developed to meet the needs of migrant workers in Europe, is now widely regarded as the most appropriate for use in schools. Fundamental to this approach is the active use of language for communication, rather than the study of language as a rule-governed system.

Since language teaching was, until relatively recently, completely dominated by formal and structural approaches, many teachers – and indeed students – have been influenced in their attitudes by these older orthodoxies. As a result, those involved in promoting a communicative approach need to be especially vigilant about ensuring that the approach is not subverted from within during implementation, that the primacy of meaning is maintained, that the main focus does not shift back to form. Those working outside the target-language-speaking area face the additional task of creating a language-rich environment inside the classroom – an environment which provides not only the opportunity but also the need for meaningful communication in the target language.

The communicative approach then, presents planners and implementers with several crucial challenges – challenges which, in the field of school-based foreign language teaching, are all too often not met and sometimes not even addressed. There are far too many "communicative" classrooms where students take part in role-play dialogues as meaningless as any Skinnerian drill, and

"communicative" course books which are formal and structural in all but name.

Some argue that the problem of reconciling practice with communicative teaching theory is one which should be addressed at the level of implementation and that a syllabus, by specifying functions or target tasks, is doing as much as a syllabus should to direct implementers towards a realization of language as communication. Others argue that the syllabus should chiefly – even solely – concern itself with the ways in which the language is to be learnt. Recent debate in this area has revolved around the relative merits of functional-notional, procedural, process and task-based syllabuses (see, e.g., Breen 1987, Prabhu 1987, Long and Crookes 1991), with proponents of these various approaches all professing a central concern with the "meaningful use" of language.

It seems to me, however, that none of these syllabus types is informed by a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of what "meaningful language use" entails in a classroom context. As a result, none provides, in itself, an adequate framework for a genuinely communicative approach to language learning.

In this section I will argue that what is required is a focus on meaning at the level of the course as a whole, not just at the level of the individual lesson or task or exercise; and that the only syllabus which can provide this kind of focus is a syllabus based on the target language as a language through which the students learn, rather than as a language to be learnt.

1.1 Classroom interaction

It seems to be generally agreed that students of a foreign language need to use it for meaningful communication rather than study it as a system of rules, and that they need to use it purposefully now rather than merely practise now for future use. There also seems to be general agreement that target language use is more meaningful the closer it is to natural language use (Devitt 1989), and that language learning should be as contextualized as possible (Little et al. 1985). The natural language use which is most relevant here is that of the students' learning environment, the school classroom.

But is the language use which naturally occurs in the classroom sufficient, in terms of input and the negotiation of meaning, for

successful acquisition? And if so, is it possible to replicate such interaction in the *language* classroom?

A study of traditional (and still all too typical) teaching methods might suggest that the classroom is not a suitable environment for language acquisition, so that the practice of communicative language teaching will always fall short of what the theory suggests is possible. According to Allwright and Bailey, for example, "observations of many different classes both in content area subjects and in language instruction, consistently show that teachers typically do between one half and three quarters of the talking done in classrooms" (1991, p.139).

Where students are invited to talk, it is usually within a very restricted discourse framework. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) report that a very high proportion of classroom exchanges are made up of three moves: (i) the teacher asks a question, (ii) the student answers it, and (iii) the teacher provides evaluative feedback. A number of studies (e.g., Devitt 1989) have found that in these IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback) exchanges, teachers typically ask questions to which they already know the answers (and where, presumably, the student to whom the question is addressed knows that the teacher knows). It seems to me predictable that such display questions would predominate in IRF exchanges, since both very much exemplify the philosophy underlying the expository approach to teaching. As Stubbs notes, "the pupil's role is passive [...] the assumption is that it is the teacher who has control over who talks when; and that education consists of listening to an adult talking, and answering his or her questions" (1976, p.97).

Of course, while it is a restricted form of interaction, there is no reason why the display question-and-answer exchange should not provide a framework for at least a limited kind of genuine communication in the language classroom. But as a number of researchers have found, in the language teaching context such exchanges almost invariably concern form, not content, so that although the exchange is taking place in the target language, it could hardly be said to constitute "meaningful use" of the language. In his study of interaction during language lessons Devitt found that 85.9% of the display questions in the German lesson and 70.4% in the French lesson, were related to form (1989, p.28).

Long and Sato (1983) examined six ESL lessons by six different

teachers and found that of 938 questions recorded, fewer than 14% were referential; just over half were display questions, and the rest echoic. They also recorded the same teachers interviewing ESL students in a non-classroom situation, and here, of 1,320 questions all but two were referential. Long and Sato conclude: "ESL teachers continue to emphasize form over meaning, accuracy over communication. This is illustrated for example by the preference for display over referential questions and results in classroom NS–NNS [native-speaker/non-native-speaker] conversation which differs greatly from its counterpart outside classrooms, even when the non-native speakers there are of equally low Second Language proficiency" (ibid., pp.283f.).

In traditional, teacher-centred classrooms the role in interactions assigned to most students most of the time is that of listener. But all too often students don't even play that role – they miss the interaction altogether, because they are simply not paying attention. In more learner-centred classrooms, active participation in the lesson is encouraged through the use of group and pair work. Research shows that group and pair work not only increase the amount of "learner talking time" but can also widen the range of interactions and roles the students become involved in. In relation to language learning in particular, Doughty and Pica (1986) studied an information-gap exercise performed in small-group, pair and whole-class situations. They found that group and pair work resulted in more modified interaction (more negotiation of meaning) than the "teacher-fronted" whole-class situation – almost four times more, in terms of comprehension and confirmation checks and requests for clarification.

A number of earlier studies had shown similar results. Long et al. (1976), for example, compared the target language that learners used when they worked in pairs, with that used in "lockstep" (whole-class) situations. They found that learners working in pairs got more turns, which is only to be expected. However, they also found that learners working in pairs performed a wider range of functions with the language.

Of course, pair work and group work do not of themselves produce "meaningful language use": how meaningful the language use is depends on a number of things, not least the nature of the task. Fortunately the nature of the "typical" classroom task is chang-

ing. While a lot of classrooms are still very teacher-centred, there is a general trend towards more democratic teaching styles and towards discovery rather than expository learning methods, with students being encouraged to acquire knowledge actively through investigation and experimentation. As a result, students in many countries are becoming accustomed to new ways of working in the classroom. There is an emphasis on group work, on co-operative problem solving and decision making, on open-ended discussion and debate.

In terms of language use, this broadens significantly the range of functions which are routinely performed within a lesson – to such an extent, it seems to me, that "natural language use" in the "new" classroom could provide a sufficient basis, in terms of interaction, for a communicative approach to language learning.

No matter how wide in range it is, however, classroom interaction is different from interaction outside the classroom in the sense that it takes place within the explicit context of learning new knowledge and developing skills – a context which lends meaning to the interaction. And this is something which the communicative language class must surely take into account.

1.2 Language learning and communication goals

If, as seems to be the case, students will be most successful in acquiring a language when they are more concerned with communicating in the language than with studying it, then the goals which students are set in the language classroom should, whenever feasible, be seen to be communication goals rather than explicit language-learning goals. And in the general classroom context communication goals are normally bound up with the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

If a classroom activity has no obvious purpose beyond the practice or use of the target language – if the only new thing which the students are learning is the target language itself – then the interaction is, to that extent, artificial, the goal is not a genuinely communicative one, and the focus will shift from meaning to form.

Take two examples of language classroom activity:

- in pair work, students (often friends), question each other at a very basic level about their families, homes, daily activities, etc.;
- in role play, students buy a ticket at a train station.

Because what is acquired here has no value to the students (knowledge they already possess in one case, an imaginary train ticket in the other), such meaning as the task has resides solely in the use of the language for its own sake, and that does not constitute meaningful use. The role play example given above has the added drawback of being very artificial in a classroom context, making its "language practice" nature even more obvious, and so language use even less meaningful.

What is true of classroom tasks is also true of texts. Texts of one kind or another are used in most language lessons, and most texts contain some content other than the language itself, which can be acquired by a student. But if the reason for introducing a text into the classroom is not primarily its content, but rather the fact that, because it is in the target language and comprehensible to students at a particular level, it can be used as a tool in language work, then there is always the danger that the communicative value of the text itself, the possibilities it presents for meaningful interaction between teacher and students, and among students (and indeed, between student and text) will not be exploited.

When the acquisition of new knowledge – by which I mean knowledge of the world or self-knowledge rather than knowledge of linguistic form – is a goal, there may be a greater range and a higher quality of interaction, in terms of input and the negotiation of meaning, between teacher and student, and between student and student, because (i) the understanding which has to be achieved relates not just to the translation of known notions from one language into another, but also to the understanding of new concepts, with the complex mental mapping that involves, and (ii) if group-based active learning methods are employed, the deduction or induction of the knowledge may require the co-operative use of a number of different skills.

Course book designers and teachers who are concerned about providing meaningful classroom use of the target language, do produce units and lessons where students are given the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and develop skills through the target language, rather than just translate existing knowledge and skills into it. But such units and lessons are rarely structured so as to build on the "content" knowledge (as opposed to knowledge of functions and notions) acquired in previous units, or prepare the

ground for the introduction of new content in future lessons. The students become aware that the only coherence in the course is the language itself, and so their perception of the purpose of the course is defined in terms of mastery of the target language. I suspect that this is not conducive to a continuing focus on communication goals – a focus on meaning at the level of the course as a whole.

The necessary focus on meaning can be maintained, I believe, if a coherent syllabus of knowledge is studied through the target language; if students' progress in that subject syllabus is formally assessed (to prevent teachers treating the syllabus as a mere "carrier" for language study); and if the assessment is conducted through the target language.

1.3 The target language as a language of discovery

The idea of learning the target language by using it to learn something else is not a new one (see, e.g., Widdowson 1978, Krashen 1987, Prabhu 1987, Byram 1989, and Devitt 1989) and has been tried in practice, notably in the French immersion programmes in Canada.

At secondary school level the Canadian programme has typically involved students studying all subjects through French for one or two years. According to Genesee (1984, p.40), immersion students have not suffered long-term deficits in English language development or academic achievement, and they have acquired greater competence in the French language than is usually achieved by students following traditional language courses.

While immersion programmes are presently being tried in countries like the Netherlands and Germany, they are probably most feasible in bilingual societies where state education is offered in both languages, so that suitable teaching materials – and teachers – are available in both languages for all curriculum subjects. In monolingual education systems, even if immersion programmes are limited to one or two subjects for one or two years, it is still a difficult task to ensure that immersion students are covering the same areas of the syllabus as other students and so will not be at a disadvantage when they transfer back to the mainstream class, or have to sit subject exams in their first language.

If lessons do not include appropriately targeted language work, there is a danger that immersion courses could result in distor-

tions in language acquisition. The underdevelopment of productive skills relative to receptive skills could, for example, occur where traditional, teacher-fronted methodologies are used in the immersion class and students as a result are required to produce very little language. In a major study of interaction in Canadian immersion classes, Swain (1991, p.237) found that in only 14% of student turns was the utterance longer than a clause.

Swain also found that the language used in content classes was "functionally restricted", and she gives two examples of the problems which can arise as a result: the overuse by students of *tu* (where *vous* is required) and the overuse of the *passé composé*, both of which she traces back to teacher input. This problem can be dealt with, she says, by contriving activities which make use of functions otherwise infrequently present.

Even if the practical problems associated with immersion can be overcome, there still remains a doubt about the extent to which the approach can be justified in general educational terms. The question must be asked: if a subject is worth learning, why should students learn it through a second or foreign language, rather than their first language – why should the learning task be made more difficult for them? While Genesee reports that immersion students were not disadvantaged academically, it is probable that they had to make a greater effort than normal to maintain their level in the subject areas, at least in the initial stages of immersion. As far as I am aware, studies of immersion programmes in Europe have concentrated on the students' L2 development, and have not specifically looked at their progress in the subject area (relative to pre-immersion rates of progress and to the progress made by their peers outside the immersion programme).

As Devitt (1989) has pointed out, there is one subject which can legitimately be taught through the target language, and that is the culture or cultures of the target language. In recent years there has been a growing realization of the importance of cross-cultural awareness, and a growing interest in the introduction of comparative cultural studies to the school curriculum. The increasing "internationalization" of the world, in economic and political terms, means that this interest is not confined to societies with ethnic minorities, but is increasingly being perceived as a general need.

There has also been a growing awareness on the part of those

involved in the humanities area of the school curriculum, of the need for students to have access to primary sources wherever possible. In the context of classroom-based cultural studies, primary source material must consist largely of original, unmediated – in other words, *authentic* – texts, so a knowledge of the target culture's language would be, at the very least, desirable for such studies.

At the same time there is much to suggest that an understanding and appreciation of the culture can better motivate students to learn the target language. And many applied linguists would argue that students cannot achieve communicative competence in a language without an understanding of the culture of that language.

So an integrated "language-and-culture" syllabus could be justified both on language learning and on general educational grounds. And the syllabus elements could be selected and sequenced so that work in one area supported the other. Such a syllabus, by making cultural issues explicit, could force course designers and implementers to consciously address the ways in which "foreigners" are represented and cultural differences dealt with – and so, hopefully, could help eliminate the kind of stereotyping which is still found in some language course books. And, most importantly, by obliging course designers and other implementers to themselves "focus on meaning" – to consider how the language can be used to communicate an understanding and appreciation of the culture – an integrated language-and-culture syllabus would be ensuring the adoption of the desired communicative approach to a greater extent than is the case at present.

2 Defining and describing "culture" for a course of cultural studies

In order to successfully design and implement an integrated syllabus of the kind proposed in the previous section, it will be necessary to redefine what culture means in the context of the school language classroom. For many years culture in the language classroom was synonymous with literature, and as such was regarded as an important area of study. Textbooks for the grammar-translation method were often based on selections from the "best authors", and reading "great works" in the original was widely seen as one of the main reasons for learning a language. But in time, more practical considerations took precedence and the emphasis shifted

to the spoken word and the language of transaction. There was no real place for literature in the structuralist approach to language teaching, and early realizations of the communicative approach tended to ignore literary texts (Little et al. 1989, p.25). So for several decades culture was not explicitly taught, or much thought about, in the language classroom.

In the 1980s, however, language teaching began to take account of studies in the field of pragmatics and to acknowledge the extent to which cultural factors affect communication (see, e.g., van Ek 1986). As a result, there is now a growing awareness of the learner's need to acquire a knowledge of the target language culture in order to communicate effectively in that language. At the same time, in the general educational context, an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity is coming to be regarded as a desirable aim of the school curriculum, and as an aim which is at least as relevant to language learning as it is to social studies. For these reasons culture is once again being seen as a legitimate concern of language teachers, and a growing number of new course books profess in their introductions to "promote cultural awareness" and "foster positive attitudes towards the target language community" (for a discussion of one such course book, see Byram 1989, pp.122ff). However, while the conception of culture now generally found in the language classroom is no longer as narrow as a simple equation with literature, it is still too narrow to provide a satisfactory basis for cultural studies.

Communicative course books generally interpret culture to mean way of life, which is not in itself an unsatisfactory definition, but the view of "life" they present is usually very limited. It is a view almost entirely confined to material artefacts and observable, everyday behaviour taken largely at face value. What this does is give students a sense (and often a false sense) of the "otherness" or "sameness" of a foreign culture without giving them any basis for understanding it. The students are provided with the cultural forms but not the meanings which underlie those forms.

2.1 Culture as meaning

If culture is about anything it is about meaning and the communication of meaning. Geertz, for example, describes culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in

symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in a symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (1975, p.89). And Williams offers a "social" definition of culture as "a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour" (1965, p.57).

The study of any culture must involve looking beneath the surface phenomena – the institution, the artefact, the custom – to the beliefs and values which created them and to the causes and consequences of those beliefs and values. And because a culture manifests itself not just in the social reality it creates, but also in the individual's experience of that reality, a study of culture must look at individual as well as communal responses to the everyday (and the extraordinary) experiences of life. Finally, the culture must as far as possible be allowed to speak for itself, to describe itself in its own terms, rather than be viewed from the perspective of those looking in from the outside.

Such an approach to cultural studies obviously demands a lot more of teacher and student than the "tourist guide" approach found in many course books, but it is necessary. Otherwise students will not achieve an understanding of culture deep enough to enable them to empathize with people of other cultures and come to perceive how a common humanity can, depending on circumstances and choices, manifest itself culturally in very different ways. And such a perception must be the ultimate aim of cultural studies, not mere awareness of diversity, mere tolerance of difference.

In practical terms this calls for an integrated approach which looks not only at the customs and habits of everyday life, but also at folklore and literature, art, music, material artefacts, institutions and patterns of social organization, and seeks to reveal the ways in which they are all linked.

2.2 Culture in language

If the foreign culture is studied through authentic texts then students may become aware of the ways in which meanings are conveyed both *through* and *by* language – of the way in which the culture is encapsulated in language – and so come to realize how their own language communicates cultural meanings implicitly as

well as explicitly.

One language may be used to communicate more than one cultural reality of course. Every society has various strata and subcultures, and very different societies in different parts of the world may, for historical reasons, use the same language. When it comes to providing the cultural component of language courses, course designers usually opt for one country and often for one region, and within that region a very small set of subcultures. Such selectivity is not necessarily very limiting (it depends on the pedagogical approach adopted); but I would like to suggest that where it is possible, a wide survey embracing not just the sub-cultures of a particular society but a whole range of very different societies, would be more valuable in promoting both cultural awareness and language awareness. Such an approach is possible in the case of English, for example.

2.3 One language, many worlds

In over fifty countries around the world English is either the mother tongue of the majority or an official national language. Included in this number are countries with very different value systems and very different ways of life – cultures from all regions of the world: South America as well as North America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australasia (see appendix).

In some of these countries, it is true, English is very much a second language, spoken at work and at school but generally not at home or among friends. Nonetheless, it is often possible to find a comprehensive insider's view of the culture expressed through English. In Zimbabwe for example, Shona and Ndebele are the mother tongues of the vast majority; English, however, is the language of second- and third-level education and so a large number of pedagogical texts on Zimbabwe have been written in English, but by Zimbabweans for Zimbabweans. English is also used extensively in public administration and commerce and, to a lesser extent, in social and political debate at national level. It is possible to follow current developments in the country through English-language newspapers, magazines and television programmes. And a significant number of Zimbabwean novelists, dramatists and poets are now writing in English, so it is also possible to explore cultural issues through literary texts.

In the past, of course, in Zimbabwe as in other parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world, the use of English in schools and in public administration was part of a process of colonization, of the inculcation of British values and attitudes. Now, however, in an increasing number of countries, English is finding a new role as an "intercommunal" and "international" language, and is being seen, in Kramsch's phrase, as "a legitimate vehicle for the expression of native cultures" (1993, p.254).

When Chinua Achebe, for example, decided to write about the conflicts and changes of the colonial period in Nigeria, and to record for posterity the vanishing traditions of his people, he wrote not in Igbo but in English. His accounts of the worlds of his father and grandfather, in such widely acclaimed novels as *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, are arguably no less authentic for being written in a second language. They are at the very least authentic in the sense that they are one Nigerian's view of Nigerian history and society, written for a Nigerian as well as an international audience.

2.4 Creating new traditions

Some writers and critics have argued that it is not really possible to express a non-European world view through a European language, and that attempts to do so inevitably result in work which is culturally impoverished or, worse still, false. However, while difficulties certainly exist, quite a number of writers seem to have found an accommodation between different literary and cultural traditions which is enriching rather than impoverishing. Take, for example, *The Song of Lawino* by one of Africa's best known poets, the Ugandan Okot p'Bitek. This book-length poem is written in English, but its images and allusions are drawn from African songs and stories rather than the common stock of English literature, and Okot uses literal translations of Acoli proverbs and sayings rather than "importing" equivalent English proverbs. While the poem follows certain English literary conventions, it also employs Acoli rhetorical devices. The overall result is that *The Song of Lawino* is full of cultural resonances for Acoli and other East African readers, while offering the outsider a window on to a different world.

2.5 Taking the broad view

Because a significant number of different cultures find expression in the English language, it is possible to design an integrated language-and-culture course which, while drawing exclusively on authentic texts in English, provides an introduction to the diversity of human experience. Such an approach would have some important advantages over the more usual one in which only two cultures are compared – the learner's own culture, and the culture of a dominant member of the L2 community (in the case of the English language, usually Britain, the United States, Canada or Australia). The most important and probably most obvious advantage is that of context.

When a student is presented with just one other culture and that culture is very foreign, she may be inclined to attribute perceived differences to the fact that her own culture is normal and the other is an aberration – at best simply "odd", at worst "uncivilized". Conversely, if the other culture is very similar to her own, if there are only subtle differences in the underlying value and belief systems, then it may be difficult to show that such systems exist and that they influence cultural behaviour. As a result the student may assume that cultural differences are trivial and superficial matters.

If the student's culture is seen in the context of a wide range of others, however, it will be easier for her to realize that hers is just one of many possible manifestations of human culture. A large sample will also make it easier to pursue a thematic approach to cultural issues, and to demonstrate patterns of cultural development.

It may also be easier for students to come to an understanding of the relationship between language and culture if they have the opportunity to study what happens when one language is used to express very different cultures, and if differences in expression are traced back to their cultural roots.

The study of key words and concepts could be particularly fruitful here. One could, for example, look at why a people chose to introduce into English certain terms from their original language, rather than adopt the English term, and conversely at how the same English word – *family*, for example – can vary in meaning from one English-speaking community to another. A study of how the metaphors of different cultures lead to different forms of idiomatic Eng-

lish could also be used to illustrate the relationship between language and cultural meaning, as could the study of discourse patterns (in all such studies, of course, a clear distinction would need to be made, in the use of authentic texts, between communities whose cultures are primarily or solely expressed through English, and communities where English is an official, but secondary language).

In language learning terms it would of course be best for students to focus on one particular English-speaking community, and the choice of this target culture would obviously be determined by the students' practical needs. But whatever culture is chosen, it is important that language use in that culture is studied against a broader background, so that students have the opportunity to develop, if not a multicultural competence, then at least an awareness that English is a "multicultural" language and that "appropriate language use" can vary from one English-speaking community to another. If students have this awareness, if they are alert to the possibilities of cultural differences leading to communication breakdown, then they are perhaps more likely to communicate successfully should a situation arise where they have to find their own way through the uncharted waters of an unfamiliar culture.

2.6 Self-expression

Using literary texts by writers who learnt English as a second language could be very useful in showing students how they too could find new ways of expressing themselves through English; how they could achieve an authentic individual voice in English and so make the language a part of themselves. This aspect of language use – self-expression – is all too often overlooked in the "transactionalism" that characterizes a lot of communicative language teaching.

In summary, then, what I suggest here is that the English language offers special opportunities for comparative cultural studies and that, for general educational and language-learning reasons, these opportunities should be fully exploited in the design of an integrated language-and-culture syllabus. It is worth noting here that the languages of other former colonial powers – for example, French, Spanish and Portuguese – offer similar opportunities.

3 An integrated syllabus

So far I have argued that an integrated language-and-culture syllabus may be the best way of achieving a genuinely communicative approach to school-based language learning. I have also suggested that, where possible, the cultural studies should be broadly based, enabling students to acquire a deeper understanding than would be available from a simple comparison of two cultures. The syllabus presented here is one possible realization of such an approach. It is designed for use in the junior cycle of second-level education – in other words with 12–16-year-old students, most of whom would have little or no knowledge of the L2 (in this case English) at the beginning of their course.

It is central to the integrated approach advocated in section 1 that the syllabus is pursued solely through the medium of the L2 and that the study of language is fully contextualized within the study of culture. In order to promote the kind of classroom interaction which aids language acquisition, the syllabus specifies the adoption of active, group-based learning methods; and because it is desirable that other cultures are presented, as far as possible, in their own terms, the syllabus calls for the extensive use of authentic texts.

Working with *ab initio* language learners presents particular challenges, and some have suggested that these are challenges which cannot be successfully met in the context of a content-based course because such learners can only deal with very simple – or simplified – meanings when working through the L2. For this reason many of those who advocate cultural studies as part of language teaching believe that beginner and elementary-level students should study a foreign culture through their L1 rather than through the language of the culture (see, for example, Byram 1989, p.101).

However, since a student brings the same capacity for conceptual understanding and analysis to a foreign language text as she does to an L1 text, it should be possible for her to grasp complex meanings in an L2 text which is made accessible to her, even if she is not at present able to express those meanings adequately in her L2. So rather than providing students with specially written material which attempts to present cultural issues in elementary English, and so of necessity oversimplifies them, it is a question of making authentic texts accessible to beginner and elementary-level

language learners. This can be done through pedagogical approaches which activate the student's general knowledge and knowledge of discourse, and bring these to bear on the task of understanding the text (see Devitt 1989, Little et al. 1989).

English language and cultural studies
An integrated syllabus for secondary school students, years 1 to 4 (junior cycle)

1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims

- To help students achieve an understanding of the nature of culture, and so a better understanding of human society and of themselves as individuals.
- To enable students to acquire a second language through which they can gain new insights and in which they can discover new forms of self-expression.
- To help students acquire the knowledge and the skills they need to become independent, creative adults capable of autonomous thought and action.

Objectives

Students should achieve a general understanding of

- culture as a system of beliefs and values underlying the customs, traditions, artefacts and institutions of a society;
- the environmental, social, economic and political factors which influence cultural development;
- how a culture is transmitted from one generation to the next;
- the ways in which languages encode and communicate cultural meanings.

Students should acquire:

- an awareness of a common humanity expressed in cultural diversity;
- an appreciation of cultural diversity;
- an ability to empathize with people from other cultures;
- a multicultural competence in language use;

- a willingness to look critically at the values and beliefs of their own culture, as well as those of other cultures.

By studying through the medium of English, students should achieve a proficiency in English which will allow them to express themselves in that language and which will give them access to, and an understanding and appreciation of, the culture of English-speaking communities.

Through active, student-centred learning methods students should develop their cognitive and social skills, particularly in the area of co-operative decision making and problem solving.

2 STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Through the medium of English, students will study key areas of cultural development using authentic texts from a variety of different cultures.

General approach

There are four main areas of study. The approach is cyclical, with students revisiting particular topics and themes over the course of the four years, acquiring an increasingly deeper understanding of the issues involved. Although the study areas are designed to be coherent in themselves, they are not discrete and a learning unit may cover aspects of two or more areas.

As far as possible students should work from the concrete to the abstract, and topics and themes should be sequenced so that patterns of cultural development become apparent.

While some topics might seem to lend themselves "naturally" to a focus on particular forms or functions (as a discussion of good luck and bad luck superstitions might lend itself to a focus on the first conditional/expression of cause and effect) it should be possible, through task and text selection, to give a fully contextualized treatment of a particular form or function under almost any topic. However, while grammar will need to be explicitly treated throughout the course, the selection and sequencing of topics, texts and tasks should be determined, as far as is possible, by the demands (linguistic and non-linguistic) of the cultural studies course, rather

than by a separate formal or functional-notional agenda.

Choice

The syllabus and the assessment procedures are designed to give teachers considerable scope for matching course content and activities to the needs and interests of their students. This can be done through negotiation between teacher and students, and it is hoped that teachers will avail of the opportunities presented here to promote learner autonomy in the classroom.

Selection of case studies

The four course sections should be approached through a general survey of at least five cultures, selected so as to ensure that students have the opportunity for comparative study in the following areas:

- industrial and rural societies;
- diverse geographical regions;
- different religious and political belief systems;
- (where possible) an English-speaking culture similar to their own culture.

The four sections should also be studied, in depth, in relation to one particular culture – the same culture for each of the sections, and for all four years of the syllabus. English language use in this culture should be the principal focus of the students' explorations of the way in which language transmits culture.

Topics and themes

The four areas of study are: *Home, The Natural World, Heroes and Heroines* and *Teenagers*. Themes and topics are detailed below.

Section A: HOME

The home as a material artefact, shaped by concepts of *family, family life,* and *community* as well as by the physical environment and by economic and social factors.

Beliefs about the preternatural and the supernatural reflected in customs and traditions associated with the home.

Home as a place in the mind. The role of family and community

in personal identity. Leaving home, homelessness and exile.

Section B: THE NATURAL WORLD

The historical relationship between the natural environment and material culture: the influence of climate and landscape on housing, dress, food, art forms, musical instruments, and forms of recreation.

Historical and contemporary relationships between people and animals in different cultures. Animals in myth and legend.

The effect of a culture's values and beliefs on its relationship with the natural world (with particular reference to concepts of *ownership* and *guardianship*, as they relate to the exploitation of natural resources).

Section C: TEENAGERS

The rights and responsibilities of teenagers – and so the various roles played by teenagers – in different societies; how these are affected by different conceptions of *childhood* and *adulthood*, *family* and *filial duty*, as well as by economic and social factors.

The formal and informal education provided for teenagers by different cultures. The transmission of customs and traditions – and the underlying values and beliefs – from one generation to the next. Cultural issues as a source of conflict between the generations.

Teenage fashions in dress, music, art, sports and games. How such fashions spread from one culture to another, and how their adoption is affected by cultural and economic factors.

Section D: HEROES AND HEROINES

Famous men and women from the history of different cultures – patriots, rebels, artists, philosophers, explorers, inventors, etc. – showing the extent to which concepts of *heroism* and *greatness* vary (or do not vary) across cultures and times, and the way in which such concepts reflect underlying values and belief systems.

3 TEXTS

Learning units should be based around the extensive use of au-

thentic English-language texts. Such texts should include: extracts from school course books and other pedagogic material; films, television and radio programmes; official documents and records; technical manuals; travel guides; newspapers and magazines; a wide range of literary texts, including poetry and drama.

4 TASKS

General approach

The adoption of active, student-centred learning methods is necessary if the syllabus objectives are to be achieved. While students will need regular opportunities to work alone, as individuals, pair-work and group-work activities should predominate.

To derive the maximum benefit from such activities students should be involved in substantial, meaningful tasks which require them to co-operate in order to make decisions and achieve results – specifically to set realistic goals, devise and follow work plans and timetables, identify and solve problems, evaluate work in progress and, when necessary, revise goals and plans.

Whether working individually or in groups, students should be encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning. As part of this process, students should be encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences, and evaluation and self-evaluation should be regarded as essential elements of any task.

Range of task types

Tasks should be designed so that students have the opportunity to engage with authentic texts in a variety of different ways – conceptually, emotionally and imaginatively.

Students should achieve their knowledge and understanding of other cultures through active investigation and reflection. Among other things this should involve the students in locating and soliciting factual information from a variety of sources, recording and collating the information, interpreting and evaluating (recognizing patterns, distinguishing fact from opinion, identifying bias, etc.), summarizing, synthesizing (making generalizations, drawing conclusions), and finally, giving oral or written presentations of their work.

Students should enlarge their emotional and imaginative understanding of other cultures through working with texts which make accessible the personal experiences of individuals living in those cultures. Students should develop their ability to empathize – and their ability to express their own feelings and experiences – through imaginative approaches to such texts, re-enacting, retelling, or creating their own texts in response.

Detailed study

It is important that the students' understanding of cultural development has depth as well as breadth, and for that reason students should be involved in detailed explorations of a number of themes and topics. It is also very important for their English-language development that students are involved in extended productive (particularly written) work. For both of these reasons, the syllabus requires that students undertake three major projects, one in the third year and two in the fourth year of the cycle. Between them the three projects should cover most of the text types and all of the text approaches specified above.

5 ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Assessment objectives

- Students should demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the topics and themes outlined in the four main areas of study (Sections A to D of Part 2).
- In their projects, students should demonstrate an ability to research, analyse and synthesize information, and to plan, execute and evaluate programmes of work.
- Students should demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively in the English language.
- Students should display an awareness of the ways in which cultural factors affect communication.

The levels of proficiency which students need to achieve in order to meet these objectives are set down in detailed descriptor bands. These descriptor bands provide the basis for the awarding of grades in formal assessments and are made available to teachers as a guide to standards.

Assessment methods

- While the course is an integrated one and cultural studies provide the framework for all four assessments, language proficiency and cultural knowledge are assessed and graded separately.

English language

Assessment 1: an oral assessment, based on the presentation and discussion of project work done in years 3 and 4.

Assessment 2: a two-and-a-half-hour written examination based on an unseen authentic text, with sections designed to test (a) comprehension and (b) transactional and creative writing skills.

Cultural studies

Assessment 3: submission of an individual or group project carried out during year 4, along with a project questionnaire which is completed individually and unaided, under teacher supervision.

Assessment 4: two-and-a-half-hour written exam, in three sections:

- unseen authentic text with understanding and response questions;
- case-study exercise involving practical application of cultural awareness;
- essay-type question (answer one of four) on an aspect of the course (students may not draw on the project submitted for assessment 3 in answering this question).

4 Implementing the syllabus

4.1 Introduction

The syllabus calls for student-centred classrooms where the emphasis is on co-operative group work, where discovery learning is the norm, where the study of language is fully contextualized within the study of culture, and where the L2 (English) is the sole language through which the students work. Implementing such a syllabus is not without its challenges – especially at beginner level

– but, as has already been argued, there are considerable gains to be made if those challenges are met.

Some general points relating to implementation are briefly discussed here, and sample lesson plans are provided to illustrate some of the approaches which can be adopted.

The language of the classroom In many secondary schools the students' L1 is used during the initial stages of L2 learning. The teacher uses the L1 for general classroom management, for giving instructions, explaining meanings and points of grammar, and for checking comprehension. Indeed, it is not unusual to hear teachers say that it would not be desirable, even if possible, to work solely through the L2. The fact that it *is* possible is, however, demonstrated in thousands of classrooms every day – in commercial language institutes, in immigrant programmes, in schools. Often it is done out of necessity, because the learners do not share a common L1, or because the teacher is a native speaker of the target language who does not speak the learners' L1. But increasingly it is done out of choice, in the belief that the classroom environment must provide not only the opportunity, but also the *need* for meaningful communication in the target language, and that it is difficult to create such an environment if students – and teacher – have the option of resorting to their L1.

Presenting the L2 through the L2 is not only possible but, in practice, not particularly difficult, even at beginner level. There are well-established techniques for working with *ab initio* learners: extensive use is made of real-life objects (realia), pictures, drawings and illustrations of all kinds, so that meanings can be explained without the aid of the L1; and teachers give instructions and directions by mime, by modelling, by concrete example, and by generally exploiting the students' existing knowledge of classroom rules and routines.

Group work The syllabus calls for the adoption of group-based learning methods. This does not pose an additional challenge for the teacher as task designer, however – in fact it can make her job easier, because group work often allows students to undertake and successfully complete time-constrained tasks which they would find difficult, if not impossible, to do individually. It is also easier for a teacher to give specifically directed support and advice during classroom activities if she is dividing her time between six or

seven groups, rather than thirty individuals or fifteen pairs of students. There may be a tendency for students to lapse into their L1, especially when they are involved in difficult problem-solving activities, but this is a tendency which they can be persuaded to resist.

Discovery learning As I pointed out in section 1, new knowledge is probably most successfully acquired through active investigation and experimentation, and such an approach to learning is almost certainly the one most likely to give rise to the kind of language use which promotes successful language acquisition. For both reasons, the integrated syllabus specifies the adoption of discovery-learning methods. Their use is particularly important at beginner level, where the expository presentation of new knowledge would tend, of necessity, to be simplified and repetitive or else difficult for the students to absorb.

The 12-year-old student starting a language course already possesses a range of learning skills, and a not inconsiderable knowledge of the world. It is important, both for motivational reasons and for the development of learner autonomy, that she is given the opportunity to draw on these resources. Working with texts which have a high visual content it is possible for beginners to deduce the meaning of many words and phrases, and it can be argued that vocabulary introduced in this way is more likely to be remembered than vocabulary introduced in an expository fashion. Beginners can also retrieve surprising amounts of factual information from authentic texts, especially when the information is organized in formats already familiar to the students. In Example One (p. 28 below) beginners in the very first week of their course use English-language almanacs and atlases to produce maps of the English-speaking world.

The use of literary texts The syllabus specifies the use of a wide range of literary texts in addition to other kinds of authentic texts. Literary texts have an important role to play, not only in relation to the cultural studies component, but also in relation to the students' language development. Poetry in particular can provide valuable learning opportunities because it is often possible to find poems which express complex ideas in language which is, in lexical and grammatical terms, easily accessible to elementary – even beginner – level learners. For instance, a group of second-year stu-

dents exploring the historical relationship between people and animals in different cultures (section B of the syllabus) might study the following Pueblo Indian poem:

I went to kill the deer
Deep in the forest where
The heart of the mountain beats
For all who live there.
The eagle saw me coming and
Flew down to the home of the deer
And told him that
A hunter came to kill.
The deer went with the eagle
Into the heart of the mountain
Safe from me who did not hear
The heart of the mountain beating.
(Wood 1972)

Here the students would be asked to grasp not only the literal meaning of the individual phrases (a relatively simple task) but the metaphorical meaning of the poem. As a result the students are working, cognitively and imaginatively, at the same level in the L2 as they would be in their L1, and this must be conducive to the kind of "meaningful language use" which is the cornerstone of the communicative approach.

Language development The syllabus specifies that the study of language should be fully contextualized within the study of culture. This does not preclude the explicit treatment of grammar or the use of activities designed to develop particular language skills, but it does mean that as far as possible language work should arise "naturally" out of the cultural studies course. As argued in earlier chapters, this is not a limitation: cultural studies provide not only the "real need" required for meaningful language use but also, if topics and themes are approached in a wide variety of ways, the basis for a comprehensive experience of language use – or at least as comprehensive an experience as it is possible to achieve in a school classroom. Examples 2 and 3 (pp.32 and 34 below) illustrate some of the ways in which the integration of language development and cultural studies can be achieved.

Creative writing Creative writing should be an important part

of both language learning and cultural studies because it asks students to engage with the language and the subject in ways generally not required by transactional writing activities. Indeed, there may be aspects of cultural knowledge, particularly of the student's own culture, which only become clear in the process of trying to give imaginative expression to them.

4.2 Working with beginners

Right from the very beginning, it is possible for students to use the L2 as a language through which they learn. In the learning unit described here students in the first week of their course discover some basic facts about the English-speaking world.

Example 1: English spoken here

This learning unit presumes little or no knowledge of English on the students' part, and the teacher's use of the language needs to be accompanied by gestures, mimes, or illustrations which make her meaning clear. In Lesson 1 the students speak very little – an important aim of the lesson is to demonstrate to them that, even at this stage of the course, they can successfully extract information from English-language texts. By the end of Lesson 2 the students are following written directions and making simple statements.

Lesson 1

1. The students are organized into groups of four. On a flip chart or board the teacher displays outline drawings of three easily recognized English-speaking countries – Australia, Britain and the USA, for example – and the following information:

English is the language of Australia.
People in Australia speak English.

People speak English in:
Australia
USA
Britain
??
??

The teacher makes sure that the students understand the key words. She then writes a string of numbers (between 5 and 75) on

the board and invites each group to guess what number fits in the statement:

People in ?? countries speak English

2. When each group has guessed (by writing the number down or by pointing to it), and their names have been written beside the relevant number on the board, the teacher gives each group:

- a large outline map of the world, with political boundaries marked, but nothing else;
- an English-language atlas;
- a worksheet headed *People speak English in ...* with fourteen numbered spaces to be filled in;
- an English-language almanac (or other reference book which gives a compact listing of facts and figures on every country in the world).

The teacher suggests that students begin by using the countries already named to fill in the first three spaces on the worksheet. She then asks them to find these three countries in the atlas and, using a pencil, to write the names in on their own maps.

3. The students are told to open the almanac at a page where there are listings for several English-speaking countries (Singapore and South Africa, for example, or Uganda and the United Kingdom). The teacher points out where the information on language is given, and then indicates to students that in this way, and with the aid of the atlas (and its index), they should be able to complete their worksheet and add the names of these countries to their map. The teacher gives each group a different page of the almanac on which to start (so that no two lists are exactly the same) and a time limit of 15–20 minutes. (The teacher can use the opportunities provided here to give the students some basic words and phrases for the group work.)

The teacher quickly visits each group in turn, to check that they have understood. If a group has not organized itself properly for the task, she can suggest that two students take the almanac and the worksheet, passing on new names to the other two who have the atlas and the map.

4. At the end of the exercise each group is given a complete list of English-speaking countries, on which they tick off the ones they have located. The teacher calls out the countries one by one, ask-

ing students to indicate by saying "Yes" if they have that country on their map, in which case she ticks it off the master list (the teacher can use the opportunity presented here to do some basic work on pronunciation). At the end, two totals are written up on the board: the number of countries identified and located by the class as a whole, and the total number on the master list. The teacher congratulates students on finding out so many for themselves. The teacher then reminds students of the numbers they guessed at the beginning.

5. The teacher gives each group a cardboard folder, into which they put their map, worksheet and list of English-speaking countries. These will be used again, in subsequent lessons.

Lesson 2

1. With the aid of a world map, the teacher indicates the names and locations of continents and major regions, which the students then add to their own maps. The teacher uses this opportunity to introduce the terms *north, south, east, west.*

2. Each group is given an illustrated reference card with which they can work out the meaning of various prepositions. They are also given a worksheet to complete. The worksheet has five directions in the form:

Find two (2) English-speaking countries in Asia : 1_____ 2_____

Find one (1) English-speaking country between Venezuela and Surinam: 1_____

Find three (3) English-speaking countries beside the Gulf of Guinea : 1_____ 2_____ 3_____

and four statements, two true and two false, for example:

Cameroon is in the Pacific Ocean. (Yes/No?)

Ghana is south of Zimbabwe. (Yes/No?)

Two atlases are distributed to each group. The teacher answers one of the questions using the reference cards to demonstrate what is required and reminds the groups that as they discover the location of countries they should add the information to their maps. The students are given a maximum of 15 minutes to complete the worksheet.

3. In turn, each group supplies an answer from their worksheet. The teacher helps them to give their answers in the form of statements:

India is an English-speaking country in Asia

Guyana is between Venezuela and Surinam

Cameroon is not in the Pacific Ocean

Cameroon is in Africa

which she then asks the other groups to agree or disagree with, by saying yes or no, before she confirms the correct response.

4. Next the students pool information to add more countries to their outline maps. The teacher asks the groups to work out clues to the position of countries on their original lists (*People speak English in ...* worksheet) and to write these out in the form of a list – e.g., *Kenya is in Africa, beside the Indian Ocean, south of Somalia, north of Tanzania.*

Then each group in turn chooses from the master list a country which it does not already have on its map, and asks *Where is ...?* Whichever group has the information supplies it orally, and the others then locate the country in their atlases, and add it to their maps. Alternatively, the students can simply swap lists, lists being exchanged between the groups until the time limit has been reached.

5. The teacher asks the groups to count the English-speaking countries they have now identified on their maps, and then calls for a show of hands for 25 or more (a target most groups should have exceeded) and congratulates the students on doing well.

During the course of the year, as countries are mentioned for the first time in texts or discussion, students can be asked to check the location on their own maps, or add the name to their maps if they don't already have it, locating it with the help of other groups' maps or, failing that, their atlas.

4.3 Integrating language learning and cultural studies

The two units described here illustrate how language learning and cultural studies might be integrated at the level of the individual lesson. Both units deal with section B of the syllabus and are suitable for second-year and third-year students (lower intermediate/intermediate level) respectively.

Example 2: Why the wasp buzzes*

In this learning unit students are introduced to a traditional story of a type common to most cultures – a story which explains the origin of a natural phenomenon. The example given here is a humorous one. Students are involved in listening for specific information, inferencing, pooling information to produce a coherent text, writing and acting out stories. Students revise relative clauses and the passive voice, and there is some work on stress and intonation.

Lesson 1

1. The teacher writes on the board the following list, describing any with which the students are not familiar:

rat – cobra – wasp – plover – elephant – crow – monkey

She does not pre-teach any other vocabulary, as part of the listening exercise involves inferencing the meaning of unfamiliar words.

2. The students are told that they are about to hear the first part of a traditional story from Zimbabwe; the teacher asks them to try and follow the story as well as they can, and she gives each student something particular to listen for (e.g: "What happened to the eggs?", "Where was the snake hiding?", "What was the monkey eating?"). The teacher then reads the following text once:

One day a man and his wife went into the bush to collect figs. They soon found a tree with very big ripe figs and, telling his wife to wait below, the man climbed up and started stuffing the fruit into his leather bag. He was just taking the biggest fig of all when a black wasp stung him on the hand. He let go of the bag which was heavy with figs. "Look out!" he shouted.

The woman jumped to one side and the bag missed her, but she nearly stepped on a cobra which lay hiding under the dead leaves. This cobra was so startled that it dived into a rat's hole next to the tree. The poor rat was so terrified that it ran out of its hole and up another tree in which a crow had nested. The crow, thinking the rat was after its eggs, started cackling. It cackled so loudly that it frightened a monkey in the next tree. The monkey dropped the juicy mango

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* This unit is based in part on a unit from *English for Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe: Longman).

he was eating and the mango hit an elephant on the back. The elephant thought he was being hunted and rushed madly away, destroying a plover's nest and breaking all her eggs. The poor plover was so upset that she did not make a sound for two days and two nights.

3. Working in groups of four or five the students reconstruct as much of the story as they can, by pooling information and using the list on the board as an aid to memory. Students then write out their story, double-spaced, so that it can be edited later. Each group in turn reads out its version, points of difference are discussed, and the groups can then change their stories if they want to (using a different coloured pen, so that first and second drafts can be distinguished).

4. Students are given the text of the first part of the story and compare their versions with the original. The teacher elicits the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases.

5. The students are given the text of the next two paragraphs and asked to predict how the story ends:

Now everyone knows that the plover is always the first wild creature to wake up, and that when the sun hears her loud and raucous cries he rises from his bed and a new day begins. But since the plover was brooding over the loss of her eggs, she had not called the sun and the sky remained dark. The other animals wondered why the daylight had not come and cried out to the Great Spirit of the Heavens, asking him what had happened. So the Great Spirit summoned all the animals together and even the plover had to answer his call.

Lesson 2

1. The teacher tells the students the end of the story (in which everyone explains their role in the chain of events, except the wasp which refuses to answer the Great Spirit's questions, and is punished by being deprived of speech, forever condemned to make rude buzzing sounds).

2. The teacher suggests that this second part of the story could be dramatized, and she gives students the following pattern to follow:

Storyteller: *The Great Spirit demanded to know what had happened. The man replied:*

Man:	*I was stung by a wasp* *Up a fig tree.*
Storyteller:	*The bag said:*
Bag:	*I was dropped by the man*
Chorus:	*Who was stung by a wasp* *Up a fig tree.*
Storyteller:	*The woman explained:*
Woman:	*I was running from a bag*
Chorus:	*Which was dropped by a man* *Who was stung by a wasp* *Up a fig tree.*

3. Each group is then given a section to write and the teacher revises points of grammar (relative pronouns, active and passive voice).

4. The teacher discusses stress and demonstrates the rising intonation required on all but the final clause in each sentence. The students practise in their groups and then the piece is read aloud from beginning to end.

Lesson 3

1. The teacher points out that origin stories such as *Why the wasp buzzes* are found in most cultures (how the nightingale got its voice, the elephant its trunk, the holly its red berries, etc., etc.), and provides other examples from cultures being studied on the course. The teacher then initiates a discussion on (i) why such stories should be widespread – what common need or desire they satisfy, and (ii) the place, if any, of traditional stories and storytelling in modern societies.

2. For project work the students are asked to choose an example of an origin story from their own culture or one of the cultures under study and, working in groups, to produce a version which will then be told, recited or acted out for the rest of the class. The rest of the lesson is spent discussing possible sources for stories and helping the students to get organized.

Example 3: Save the rhino!

Working with wildlife magazines and other special-interest publi-

cations, students explore environmental and animal conservation issues and learn more about the relationships which exist between people and animals in different cultures.

The students write letters in connection with different campaigns and in the process develop their formal letter-writing skills.

Lesson 1

A selection of campaigning articles and advertisements from wildlife magazines (chosen so as to highlight areas of conflict between different cultures, and between different interest groups within a community) are distributed to the students. Each group selects a campaign in which it is particularly interested and then prepares a short report outlining the problems and proposed solutions.

Lesson 2

Each group presents its report and the students, as individuals, decide which issue they would like to work on. The groups are rearranged accordingly.

Lesson 3

The groups are each given two examples (one good and one bad) of letters of complaint and asked to compare them and say which is better and why. The teacher elicits suggestions and, in the general discussion which follows, ensures that important differences (in relation to formal letter-writing norms) between the students' culture and the target culture – the English-speaking culture which is the particular focus of the students' language work – are made explicit. Each group is then asked to select a letter-writing activity from the list of actions proposed in the articles and advertisements about their chosen campaign. Students can, for example, choose to write:

- a letter of support to the campaigning group;
- a letter of protest to the relevant authority;
- a letter requesting more information;
- a "letter to the editor" of a relevant English language newspaper or magazine.

The completed drafts are given to the teacher for written comments and suggestions.

Lesson 4

The drafts are amended, the final versions written out neatly, envelopes addressed and the letters posted. The unit ends with a revision of rules for formal letter writing. If the students receive responses to their letters, these responses can form the basis for further classroom work on letter writing.

4.4 Using project work to promote independent learning

The syllabus calls for extensive, in-depth project work in Years 3 and 4, and the assessment process is mainly based on this work. This emphasis on project work allows the teacher to provide students with plenty of opportunities to become responsible for their own learning. Within the broad framework of prescribed themes and topics, students can choose subjects and activities which match their own particular interests and needs, and they can gain valuable experience in setting goals and schedules, as well as in monitoring and evaluating their own performance. However, while the syllabus facilitates the promotion of learner autonomy, the teacher still faces the challenge of maximizing opportunities for independent learning while simultaneously ensuring that students receive the support and guidance they need for successful learning. This is no small challenge, especially in classes of thirty or more, where there may be as many as nine groups all working on different projects.

There are two general approaches which can be adopted by teachers. In the first, all students work on the same text, theme or topic, but individual groups are then free to respond in a variety of different ways. Here the teacher is chiefly concerned with helping the students to achieve an understanding of the text or topic and the possibilities which it presents for project work. In the second approach the students are free to choose their own themes or topics, but the project work is based around a common core of tasks and exercises. Here the teacher is chiefly concerned with helping students to develop specific skills. The first approach is a familiar one, frequently used in the L1 and L2 classroom. Two variations of the second approach are illustrated below.

Example 4: Behind the headlines

This project draws primarily on the students' existing knowledge,

so while they are free to work on very different subjects, the teacher does not face the practical problems of providing information and resources across a whole range of new subjects, no one of which may be relevant to more than four or eight students in the class. At the same time the project is not merely a revision of parts of the course already studied. The challenge for students lies in applying their knowledge and expertise to the identification and illumination of the cultural themes and topics raised by a given authentic text. The more connections the students can make between the text and the various strands of their course-work, the more successful the project.

Stage 1

In the course of several lessons a range of short newspaper texts are introduced and discussed (in terms of story line and vocabulary only). Each group then chooses the story they find most interesting. They are given a copy of the text and (where necessary) a fact sheet providing further information on people and places mentioned in the text.

The aim of the project is explained: to produce a large wall display, the chosen text at the centre and, radiating out from it, a range of items – commentaries, reports, creative writing, pictures, maps and other illustrations – all related in some way to the text and the cultural issues raised within it (alternatively the students can opt to produce a large format "book" of 16–20 pages).

Stage 2

Each group makes a list of the cultural topics and themes suggested by their chosen text and decides which ones to highlight. They then go through their own homework and group-work folders as well as classroom resource folders, looking for material which they can use. The students also discuss ideas – and possible sources – for new material and finally produce a "project proposal" listing the various components of the wall chart (or book), assigning responsibility for particular tasks, and giving deadlines for the completion of each component.

Stage 3

While the students are working on their projects the teacher circulates among the groups, giving advice and support where necessary. At appropriate stages she organizes general classroom ses-

sions dealing with the development of relevant language skills (drafting and editing/correcting, for example) and organizational skills (monitoring progress, dividing up time and tasks appropriately), as well as with practical matters (designing and constructing the wall chart, deciding on the lay out of the booklet). Reference books and other resources are shared out among the groups according to a schedule based on their project proposals.

Example 5: All about ...

For this project a group can choose almost any relevant topic, but it is then responsible for finding most of the material it needs on that topic. The teacher's input is centred on the development of the students' writing skills.

Stage 1

The groups are given a list of the general topics on which the English classroom has reference books or resource folders. Each group must pick two topics, one which is on the list and one which is not. With the help of the teacher the groups identify sources from which they can obtain material on their chosen topics. (If the students are going to write away to institutions and organizations soliciting information, then work on the project should be organized to start at the end of a term, so that a long school holiday falls between stages one and two, allowing plenty of time for replies to be received).

Stage 2

On the basis of the material it now has, each group decides which of its two topics to pursue. The students can choose to produce a new resource folder, a booklet, or a supplement to an existing folder.

The teacher gives the students a set of writing tasks which must be incorporated into their projects. For example:

- the summarizing of a text;
- the detailed description of a place or event;
- the (factual) description of a process;
- the definition/explanation of words and technical terms.

Each group writes a project proposal indicating the texts or other materials they will be using for each of the prescribed writing exercises.

Stage 3

The teacher organizes lessons and workshops around each of the prescribed tasks, giving students time in between to do other work on their projects. Aside from having to incorporate the prescribed tasks, each group is free to decide the overall content and direction of its project.

Completed project work can become part of the classroom resource bank, so extending the list of topics on which future students will be able to obtain information and materials. The fact that the project may become a reference work for others provides students with a "real-life" reason for paying careful attention to grammar, spelling, etc., when preparing the final versions of their folders and booklets.

4.5 Project work and the assessment process

The syllabus emphasizes the importance of group-based project work and specifies that this emphasis should be reflected in the extensive use of projects in the assessment process. Of the three extended projects which must be undertaken in the latter part of the course, one is submitted to the external examiners (Assessment 3, see p.24 above). Students complete individual "project questionnaires" under exam conditions, and these are submitted for consideration along with the project. While the exact wording might change from year to year, the questionnaire would be a general one, intended to give students a chance to comment on their projects and to demonstrate an awareness of the way in which the project relates to general themes and topics of the course. For example, in the case of a group project students might be asked (among other things):

> *What was the most difficult part of the project? Why? How did your group tackle the problem(s)?*
>
> *What was the most important contribution you personally made to the project?*
>
> *What did you learn about other cultures and/or your own culture, and about people in general, while working on this project?*

Students would have the opportunity to draw on their other project work when doing the essay section in the written cultural

studies exam (Assessment 4, see p.24 above). The choice of essay topics would include one each from the four principal sections of the course, for example:

> *Discuss the rights and responsibilities of teenagers in* ***at least two*** *cultures you have studied. Explain why concepts of "childhood" and "adulthood" might differ from one culture to another*

but would also include several general topics, for example:

> *"People are the same the whole world over." In what senses is this statement true? In what senses is it not true? Discuss in relation to* ***at least two*** *cultural issues you have studied.*

Finally, project work provides the context within which the oral assessment of language skills takes place. Students make group or individual presentations on topics which they have studied in depth and then discuss their work and their ideas with the assessor. For example, students who had written a 10-minute play based on an incident from the poem *The Song of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek (p.14 above) might make a short presentation on *The Song* and then perform part of their play. Afterwards they could discuss issues raised by *The Song*, moving on finally to more general topics.

4.6 The integrated syllabus and the school curriculum

In this paper I have argued that an integrated language and cultural studies syllabus offers the best opportunities for achieving a genuinely communicative approach to school-based language learning, and so the best opportunities for promoting successful language learning. The introduction of such a syllabus could also have a positive effect on the status of the foreign language as a school subject because, through its central role in broad-based comparative cultural studies, language learning would be seen to contribute, directly and indirectly, to other subject areas – history, geography, environmental science, civics, art and literature for example. In fact the introduction and successful implementation of an integrated language and cultural studies syllabus could play an important part in the achievement of a key educational goal – the creation of an integrated school curriculum.

APPENDIX

Countries where English is the mother tongue of the majority, or is an official national language (the list includes the larger dependent territories of Britain and the United States of America):

Antigua and Barbuda
Australia
Bahamas
Barbados
Belize
Botswana
Cameroon
Canada
Dominica
Fiji
The Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guyana
Hong Kong
India
Ireland
Jamaica
Kenya
Kiribati
Lesotho
Liberia
Malawi
Marshall Islands
Mauritius
Micronesia (Federated States of)
Namibia
New Zealand
Nigeria
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Philippines
Puerto Rico
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Soloman Islands
South Africa
Swaziland
Tanzania
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Uganda
United Kingdom
United States of America
Vanuatu
Western Samoa
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Source: *The Universal Almanac* 1990 (New York: Andrews & McMeel)

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